# Delusive

Rev. P. A. Nordell

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# Delusive Sanctification.

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BY

# Rev. P. A. NORDELL,

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# Delusive Sanctification.

T is the sad but common experience of young Christians to find, after the first enthusiasm of conversion has waned, that former sinful habits, thoughts and desires come back again in full force. The "old man," stunned but not slain by the lightnings of Sinai, is fast recovering consciousness, and being wholly disinclined to acquiesce in the new order of things, proclaims war against the "new man" in Christ Jesus. Theré will be ambushes, sudden assaults, snares where least expected, and humiliating defeats alternating with inspiring victories. Even with the best endeavors there will be a painful consciousness of not reaching the full measure of divine requirements. Too often the ensuing life is beclouded with fears and doubts arising from this unhappy state of sinning and repenting, of new resolves and fresh failures. Disappointed and dissatisfied, yet animated by a pure and noble desire for greater attainments, the young disciple exclaims: "Is there not something better than this? Must my longing for

holiness be continually hindered by inward sin and outward foes? Is there not for me a conquering as well as converting grace?" Yes, surely, there is a holy development of freedom, a fullness of spiritual life, an immanent, reconstructive, and upholding grace, a "grace wherein we stand," which it is no less the high privilege than the imperative duty of every Christian to attain. This is the constant and unmistakable teaching of God's word. The divine life in the soul is not a fluctuating tide of emotions, but an organific force, a principle of growth which, however obstructed by sin, tends to expand into the full maturity of Christian manhood and womanhood. This divine life begins in justification and regeneration. Sanctification is its goal.

If, now, a tender and susceptible spirit experiences some exalted moments when the struggle between nature and grace seems ended, when the soul rests, like "a weaned child," upon the bosom of its God, knowing and wishing to know no higher bliss than only to be there, the question most naturally arises, "Why not abide here forever? Why must I be flung back into the defilements of a sinful world, to supplication and tears, to pain and wounds, to self-denial and conflict? Why not build tabernacles on

this Mount of Transfiguration?" "Sure enough, why not?" a voice replies that seems to be a continuation of the heart's plaintive cry, "Hath a loving and holy God said that ye shall grovel till death in unwilling conflict with sin, instead of soaring heavenward on the wings of a full and present salvation? Doth not God know that in the day ye eat of the fruit of this tree of 'entire sanctification' there will be an 'instantaneous deliverance from all sin,' the extirpation of all tendencies to impurity, the inner conflict will be gone forever, and ye shall become perfect as your Father in Heaven, Heaven realized on earth?" It is the old trick, suggested long ago to Him who was led out by the Spirit into the wilderness, of reaching by a short cut that which in God's way can be reached only by a long and painful process.

There was a time when this doctrine of "Christian Perfection," was confined, among Protestants, almost wholly to the followers of John Wesley. It has, indeed, found expression elsewhere, as in the theology of Charles Finney, and among the Friends, but nowhere so extensively as among the Methodists. Though still held by them as an article of faith, it has, to the great grief of its zealous friends, in large meas-

ure disappeared from their pulpits—possibly through the influence of a healthier theology. Its prominent advocates, though still for the most part Methodists, are no longer found in any one denomination exclusively. It is now propagated in "holiness meetings" and "holiness conventions," which form a common ground for select spirits from all the Protestant bodies. By this means, and aided by its freely disseminated "holiness literature," it is liable to invade any church. It finds advocates in every denomination.

Whatever may be said in these pages concerning this error, let it be borne in mind that no word is intended in disparagement either of holiness itself, or of the untiring efforts of any, who, dissatisfied with the low average of Christian attainment, strive to realize the higher blessing of a life in God. Indeed, the advocates of "Christian holiness" do not themselves entertain any adequate conception of this supreme attribute in the moral nature of God. Holiness lies at the foundation of the moral universe, it is the Alpha and Omega of the plan of salvation, the heart and center of every true system of Christian doctrine, the earthly ideal and heavenly goal of each Christian life, the distinguish-

ing attribute of the universal church, and the key-note in the final song of redemption. Holiness in the Christian life is not the low and limited standard of practicable attainment set up by its special advocates. It discloses here and hereafter a limitless vista of attainment whose vanishing point, constantly receding, is not in the circumscribed and imperfect life of the creature, but in the infinite life of God. Of all the divine attributes, moral perfection alone is held up by our Lord himself as the ideal and inexhaustible measure of human aspiration and effort. "Be ye perfect, as your Father which is in Heaven is perfect."

### WHAT IS IT?

It will be well at the outset to understand clearly the precise nature of the error here controverted. To avoid the charge of misrepresentation, it will also be well to take our definitions from those who hold the doctrine, instead of framing them ourselves. Dismissing for the present the Romish form of the doctrine, we perceive that each of the common forms in which it presents itself postulates the possibility of attaining moral perfection in this life—" perfection" being used here not in its common mean-

ing, but in a restricted sense demanded by the theory. The various terms "entire sanctification," "Christian perfection or holiness," "full salvation," "rest in God" "second blessing," "the higher life," describe a state from which not only condemnation and guilt, but sin itself is removed, root and branch. The Christian life is sharply divided into two stages, the lower and imperfect, which follows regeneration, and the higher or perfect, which follows sanctification. In the former, sin has not been so subdued but that it still struggles for the mastery; in the latter, the struggle has ceased, because sin has been wholly expelled. The following authors are quoted with approbation in a volume entitled Perfect Love, by Rev. S. A. Wood. Rev. Wm. McDonald says: "In regeneration sin does not reign; in sanctification it does not exist." In the former "it is suspended," in the latter "it is destroyed," p. 41. Dr. Dempster, distinguishing between these two states, says: 'The one admits of controlled tendencies to sin. the other extirpates those tendencies. That is, the merely regenerate has remaining impurity; the fully sanctified has none," p. 47. These "sinward tendencies are manifestations of depravity." "Depravity is one of the results of sin." "All sin involves guilt; depravity does not unless it be assented to, vielded to, cherished, or its cure wilfully neglected," p. 42. "In the fully sanctified," says Bishop Foster, "depravity IS ENTIRELY REMOVED," p. 36. Entire sanctification is not a gradual and life-long process, but, according to Mr. Wesley, "an instantaneous deliverance from all sin," p. 36. "Sin is not a thing to be grown out of . . . there are no degrees, no progressive stages, but the work is complete at the first, and instantaneous as to time," (p. 81,) and may be attained in this present life by any believer who diligently applies himself to the task. It is distinctly affirmed that this state of Christian perfection is not absolute, angelic, nor even Adamic, but is "a modified, relative perfection, such as may be affirmed of any perfectly sanctified Christian," p. 47. The term "sinless," when understood to mean sinless, is also carefully eschewed as incompatible with the imperfect perfection professed by the wholly sanctified. The above definitions are constructed with a definite purpose, viz., to accommodate an unscriptural doctrine of perfection to the believer's present limited abilities. For it is said, as an earthly parent would not overburden his child with a load

beyond its strength, so neither will God, far more compassionate than we, lay upon his children requirements impossible to obey. This attempt to remove an apparent injustice in God's dealings with men, taken in connection with an honest desire to escape at once from the power of sin, may be considered as the real foundation and occasion of this theory. Other details might be given, but the above are the essential features.

# JUDGED BY ITS DOCTRINE.

This theory may be stated almost wholly in the language of Scripture. Herein lies its danger, for a plausible perversion of truth is the most pernicious of errors. In the New Testament believers are called "saints," because they are holy, or sanctified. This term includes all who have been brought by faith into personal communion with Christ. The New Testament contains not a single passage which directly or indirectly divides "saints" into two classes, the merely regenerate and the wholly sanctified. The only passage that seems to bear this sense is Phil. 3:15, "Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded." Here, however, the term "perfect" is used in reproachful irony of

a disturbing clique who assumed that designation, but whom Paul nevertheless urges to be like-minded with himself in pressing toward the mark, and in renouncing all pretense of being "already perfect."

In a large majority of the passages advanced as proofs, the very thing to be proved—perfectibility in this life-is quietly smuggled into the inspired text. Such passages as, "Let us go on unto perfection" (Heb. 6:1), "We speak wisdom among them that are perfect" (I Cor. 2:6), and many others, refer simply to maturity of Christian character, "to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil " (Heb. 5:14), as the context plainly indicates. Other passages, such as Col. 1:28, "that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus," refer to the heavenly consummation of the earthly life. The much quoted prayer of Paul for the Thessalonians (5:23), "The very God of peace sanctify you wholly," points rather to a process including the whole man, spirit, soul, body, and completed "at the coming [Parousia] of our Lord Jesus Christ," than to a perfected state now. The "wholly" is to be interpreted quantitatively rather than qualitatively, the entire man rather than entire sanctification.

The baptism in the Holv Spirit is often assumed to be equivalent to the "second blessing." But the New Testament does not give a single instance in which it was received or spoken of as a "second" or higher blessing. Setting aside the altogether exceptional experiences of the Day of Pentecost, which introduced the Dispensation of the Spirit, it will be seen that the gift of the Spirit always accompanied more or less closely the act of faith on the Lord Jesus Christ. The Spirit "dwelt" in them, "filled" them. He was the spiritual atmosphere into which the soul was plunged, which it breathed and in which it lived. This baptism in the Holy Spirit is the inward "seal" administered to every believer, answering to the outward immersion which is administered at the beginning of the Christian life, and which once done is done forever. Every subsequent enlargement for Christian service is not a new baptism in the Spirit, but a removal of sinful obstructions which have grieved the Spirit and hindered the believer's growth in grace, as well as his usefulness in the church.

There are, however, a few passages which seem at first sight to teach the possibility and duty of present sinless perfection. If they teach it, they teach too much. "Be ye perfect even as your Father in Heaven is perfect" means either that this perfection is the ever-enlarging but ever-unreached ideal of Christian effort, or else that nothing short of absolute, divine perfection is demanded in this life. Nor can this alternative be evaded by asserting, as some do, that "perfect" here does not mean faultless, but blameless. Such juggling with words involves the absurdity that a life not "faultless" but faulty, is nevertheless perfect; moreover, as the perfection predicated of God is the standard of human perfection, it follows that if the latter means "blameless," but not. "faultless," the former must mean the same, which is sheer blasphemy. A straight line so defined as to exclude straightness might meander around every corner in creation, and would be a beautiful exhibition of liberality, but it would wreck mathematics; moral perfection so defined as to exclude perfection might help Antinomian idealism, but it would subvert morality.

Another much quoted passage is I John 3:9. "Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God." Like

the preceding, this also proves too much, for, unless limited by other declarations in the same Epistle, it would not only prove that the regenerate are free from sin in the same degree as the entirely sanctified, which contradicts the theory, but that every one born again is put beyond the possibility of committing sin, a proposition maintained by none but the wildest fanatics.

Advocates of this imaginary perfection find it convenient to ignore another class of passages which sweep from beneath it every shadow of support.

Even if we set aside the seventh chapter of Romans as of doubtful interpretation, it still remains true that the struggle there so graphically delineated is elsewhere described by Paul as existing in the believer's soul. "The flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would." Gal. 5:17. Christ was the only sinless being in this world, and therefore he could say, "The prince of this world hath nothing in me," a claim that the holiest of saints cannot at any one instant make concerning himself. "There is not a just man upon the earth that doeth good and sinneth not." Eccl. 7:20. "If we say that

we have [not past, but *present* tense] no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." I John 1:8.

This theory rests also on an inadequate conception of sin, which, contrary to the explicit teachings of Scripture, it limits to deliberate, voluntary action. Says Mr. Wesley: "I believe a person filled with the love of God is still liable to involuntary transgressions. Such transgressions you may call sins if you please; I do not." (Plain Account, p. 67.) Beside this put Levit. 5:17: "If a soul sin and commit any of these things which are forbidden to be done by the commandment of the Lord; though he wist it not, yet is he guilty, and shall bear his iniquity." When Mr. Wesley and the Lord contradict each other, it may be prudent to side with the latter. At this point the perilous nature of this error reveals itself most clearly. teaches men to regard sin as an external, superficial thing, not as a subtle evil intertwining itself with the deepest roots of life. It makes light of the magnitude of sin, and it makes light of the magnitude of the obedience demanded by the infinitely holy law of God. Only by degrading this demand to the limit of man's diminished ability, only by minimizing sin to volun-

tary transgression, only by gliding blindly and thoughtlessly over the unexplored recesses of the hidden heart can even that so-called "Christian perfection" be attained, which, after all, is not perfection, but deception. All genuine Christian experience shows that the more thoroughly divine love does its work, the more also it humbles by revealing hidden and lingering impurities; so that the time never comes in this life when one who has an adequate knowlledge of himself may cease exclaiming, "O, wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death!" It follows, therefore, that he will never pass beyond the daily necessity of asking, "Forgive us our sins." It is affirmed, however, with strange contradiction in thought and word, that this prayer may properly be offered by one who is free from sin; for the "infirmities" and "involuntary transgressions" of the wholly sanctified are not sins even though Christ requires that forgiveness for them should be asked, not as infirmities, but as In other words, the sins incident to "Christian perfection" are not sins at all. Alas! this prayer is the rock upon which every theory of present perfectibility goes to pieces.

A very important distinction obtains between

imputed and personal righteousness. The one contemplates the believer as in Christ and without spot or blemish in the sight of God. "There is now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus." The other contemplates him as yet in the world, beset by manifold infirmities, struggling for that integrity of character, that victory over all sin, which shall eventually make his hope of becoming like Christ a glad fruition. "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling." "Thirty-and-three years have I lived in this world without sin!" said one Christian to "What," exclaimed his friend, "without sin." "Yes; though full of sin in my self, I am perfect in the sinlessness of Jesus Christ." This distinction, which is the solution of the apparent contradictions in John's first Epistle, is denied by the promoters of imperfect perfection. But that the believer is incomplete in his own personal righteousness is no less the teaching of Scripture than that he is, from the moment he believes, complete in the imputed righteousness of Christ. "Let us go on unto perfection" "perfecting holiness in the fear of God," "for the perfecting of the saints," and like expressions show, beyond dispute (were it not for the exigencies of a theory) that entire

personal sanctification is not an instantaneous acquisition, but the slow, painful working out in character of what God works in by his grace. God's word fixes no earthly limit to this task. "First hereafter will the ideal of sanctification be attained, and then always in such a manner that this attaining is an unending approach to the divine perfection."

This theory, furthermore, loses sight of the fact that the essential significance of human life in time is 'discipline, not enjoyment—toil, not If enjoyment comes or rest comes, well and good; but character is of infinitely higher value, and this grows unto perfection, not through a pietism that rests in ecstatic feelings and stimulates itself by the ejaculation of religious phrases. So long as we remain on this side of the heavenly inheritance we are under the tutelage of divinely appointed temptations and sufferings. "The harmonies of life are disturbed by disharmonies, which are to be resolved into a higher harmony." Hence the necessity of "denying ungodliness and worldly lusts." The same word is used here as in Luke 9:23, "let him deny himself;" that is, not deny his own existence, but refuse to gratify sinful appetites; this exhortation to deny ungodliness

and worldly lusts affirms, therefore, their continued existence and power. In the former sinful life there was no conflict with sin, no inward struggle against an all-embracing selfishness. The soul was dead in trespasses and sin. This struggle confronts him who would "walk in newness of life," and therefore he needs to be "strengthened with might" by the "Spirit in the inner man."

# JUDGED BY ITS FRUITS.

Our Lord gives a thoroughly fair and safe rule by which this error may be still further tried. "By their fruits ve shall know them." The prevailing tendency of this theory is to bring forth the following fruit. That there are noteworthy exceptions among those who became entangled in its meshes may be readily and joyfully admitted. But in so far as they are exceptions, it is because either they have sufficient strength of mind to resist its unsettling tendency, or they are so firmly held by the great fundamental Christian doctrines that the error, however much it may disturb their motion, has no power to swing them wholly away from their In every instance some, and in the vast majority of instances all, these fruits are obtrusive:--

- 1. A SUBTLE SELFISHNESS.—It says little of going out into the highways and byways to constrain men to come into the kingdom. No revivals of religion follow its "holiness" meetings and conventions. No grand missionary enthusiasms are born of it. Its field is not the world, but the church: not sinners, but saints. If it finds no favor in the church, it sets up meetings of its own, where its chief occupation is the canonization of its own sanctity, and the utterance of lugubrious lamentations over the "awful bondage" of ministers, deacons, and laymen. It is introspective. Losing itself in the contemplation of its own subjective states, it also loses hold of objective realities, of God, of moral law, of obligation to the church and the world, and insensibly develops a faith in its own faith. This introverted faith is also a prominent development in connection with the so-called "faithcure," which leads not unfrequently to remarkable cures of-faith.
- 2. Self-Deception.—Its experiences are, if genuine, essentially the same as those of other Christians in varying degree. There can be no Christian life without some measure of the states and blessings which entire sanctification claims as peculiarly its own. No man can become

a disciple of Christ without making at the very outset that utter renunciation of self, that wholehearted consecration to God, which is usurped as the starting-point of the "second" blessing. Does any man need a "second" blessing who has remained true to the first? If he lets the second slip, as he has the first, will he not need a third, and so on indefinitely? If the second is superior to the first, why should not the third be an improvement on the second, and the road to the highest Christian attainments lead through perpetual backslidings? Wherein does the "second" blessing differ from the experience of any Christian who, having wandered, is, through humble repentance and fervent prayer, restored to the joys of God's salvation? There were Delectable Mountains in Christian's journey, but the Shepherds did not suggest the purchase of corner lots for permanent residence. It may be pleasanter living on the Mount of Transfiguration than trying to cast out demons in the lowlands of sin; but it was apparently the mind of Christ that the former should be the exceptional, and the latter the normal, experience of his disciples. There are times in every Christian life when, through some overshadowing Providence, the soul is led through

the valley of humiliation to a higher and keener appreciation of spiritual facts than ever before, when old truths shine in a transfigured light, and old privileges assume a marvelous sweetness, when fresh supplies of grace seem to equip the soul for any service, and the whole round of common drudgeries is lifted into the amplest liberties of divine sonship, and earth itself becomes the suburbs of the heavenly city. Paul was caught up into the third heaven, yet he claimed no kind of perfection. An experience enjoyed by those whose lives give no evidence of eminent piety or sensitive conscientiousness, but which is said to transcend the experience of inspired apostles and the most devoted saints of all ages, is a delusion and a snare.

3. AN OFFENSIVE SPIRITUAL PRIDE.—Those who have attained the "second blessing" are never weary of comparing themselves with other Christians to the great disparagement of the latter. They themselves have entered into "freedom," "sweetness," "light;" others have not. They alone have an "assurance of salvation;" others are in a condition of wretched uncertainty. They are "not afraid of the Holy Ghost," and "not afraid of salvation," as other

Christians are. A pride which clothes itself in humility, which never tires of discanting on its own humbleness, which makes itself conspicuous in "unworldly" garments, is the most offensive form of pride. Attempts to evade the charge of "censoriousness" are futile, so long as other Christians, who individually may have done more to advance God's kingdom in the earth than all the professors of special holiness put together, are denounced as "time-servers," "worldly-minded," "nominal Christians." It is not many weeks since the writer heard a shining light of this order at a "holiness convention" contrast most eloquently the abundant entrance administered to the sanctified, with the narrow entrance given to other Christians, who would probably be "quarantined" outside of the celestial gates. It is usually held that purgatory is the exclusive property of the Romish Church. The excuse for filching it away in this instance is doubtless that of the French plagiarist, "I take my own wherever I find it."

Very different from this is that genuine humility which is a constant striving after holiness, which, comparing itself with other sinners, exclaims, "of whom I am chief;" which does not

claim to have reached the goal, but by the grace of God is approaching it, and which, eschewing asceticism, receives gladly and thankfully the good things of earth as from God's hand. The highest type of religious life is not that of John in camel's hair, but of Christ in the seamless robe; not that which can relinquish the beautiful things of this life, but which can wear them in unconscious subordination to a higher spiritual life.

- 4. A Painful Irreverence for God.—This doubtless springs from a notion of greater nearness to God. With impertinent familiarity some who have attained "holiness" address the Majesty of Heaven as "you," as if speaking to a corporal in the Salvation Army. From the same cause spring such improprieties as "Holy Ghost men," "Holy Ghost meetings," etc.
- 5. A RELAXED MORALITY.—By limiting sin to voluntary action, much that is sin in its most refined and dangerous form escapes censure by posing as involuntary infirmity. But these so-called infirmities are constantly encroaching on the territory of voluntary action. One transgression after another is palliated as infirmity, until presently the standard of moral obligation is so lowered as to permit a "perfectly holy"

man to do, without misgivings of conscience, what an honest man cannot do. This tendency of every form of pretended moral perfection to let down the bars of moral obligation is abundantly proved in the history of the church from the rise of Pelagianism to the latest theories of our own day.

6. ULTIMATE EFFECTS. Those who profess it will wander away from their true orbit, and if they ever return it will be after years of spiritual loss. But in many cases they never return. After a few years of feverish hallucination, they fall away entirely from their religious faith and become impregnable to spiritual influences. This error becomes equally deleterious in the church, rending it with dissensions, robbing it of effective power, hindering revivals, and leaving in many cases the ruin of what was once a flourishing church. Even among the Methodists there are multitudes of ministers who openly reject or tacitly ignore the doctrine, and churches not a few that refuse to receive ministers known to be its advocates.

The man who claims to be entirely sanctified has, however, a short way of dealing with objections. "All that has been said above, and all that may be said," he will say, "is mere *theory*;

and it avails nothing against experience." Grant that the adherents of this doctrine have the experience, and other Christians have only the theory, what follows? Paul, Augustine, Luther, Bunyan, Edwards, Whitefield, Chalmers, Payson, Judson, Spurgeon, are saints by whom God seems to have wrought marvels in the Church; but they repudiated this heresy root and branch, and it follows, therefore, that they had only theories in respect to spiritual things. They toiled and sacrificed under the impression that they had the kernel of the gospel, whereas they had only the husk. The former has been reserved for the "perfect" in this latter day. Let them keep it. We prefer to take the "husk," with the men in whom Christianity has wrought its grandest triumphs; men whose names, since the days of the Apostles, are household words; who, like David, have most profoundly explored the deep caverns of the secret heart, and most clearly perceived the evil hidden there; who have struggled most heroically against the fascinations of sin; who have cried out with vehement anguish against its all but overwhelming power, but who died victorious, having fought the fight, and kept the faith, and been made perfect through suffering. These

are the saints of all the ages, who have forgotten themselves in humble and loyal service for Christ; and who, disclaiming all perfection of their own, have cast themselves on the infinite righteousness of Christ. Deeply conscious of indwelling sin, they have seen no need of explaining away that sore cry of the soul, that prayer most profoundly adapted to their need who most profoundly know the contents of their own hearts: "FORGIVE US OUR SINS."













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